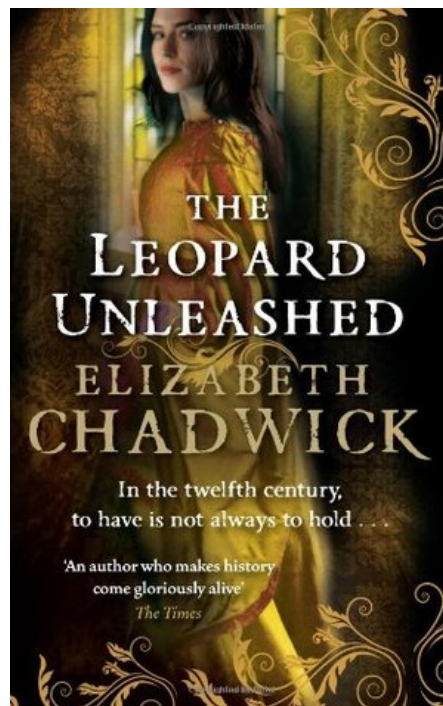




The Leopard Unleashed

Elizabeth Chadwick

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Renard, Lord of the Ravenstow, is a crusader in Antioch, a place far removed from the cold Welsh Marches of his birth. Summoned home to his ailing father, Renard brings Olwen with him, an exotic dancing girl whose sensuous beauty and wild ways have ensnared him. Yet, in a political match made by their families, Renard is already betrothed to the innocent Elene and he know he is also returning to the duty of marriage.

Torn between Olwen and Elene, Renard's personal dilemma is set against a background of increasing civil strife as Ranulf of Chester, his greedy neighbour, strives to snatch his lands. When Renard is taken prisoner at the Battle of Lincoln, his fate is placed in the hand of two women - his former mistress, now in the bed of his deadliest enemy, and his determined yet inexperienced wife, protecting his lands against terrible odds...

The Leopard Unleashed Details

Date : Published December 1st 2010 by Sphere (first published 1992)

ISBN : 9780751541366

Author : Elizabeth Chadwick

Format : Paperback 376 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Medieval, Romance, Historical Romance, Fiction

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From Reader Review The Leopard Unleashed for online ebook

Dark-Draco says

I picked this up in one of those pesky "buy two get one free" offers that always seem to catch me out.

Renard is a crusader in Antioch, a long way from the estate on the Welsh border that he is heir too. He meets the wild, exciting Olwyn, a dancing girl who dreams of leaving her hard life behind to find power and wealth...and when Renard is summoned home to attend his dying father, Olwyn tricks her way onto his retinue. But Renard is betrothed to Elene, daughter and heir of the lands next to his, and Olwyn is far from happy at being hidden away. But England is in strife - King Stephen and Queen Matilda are fighting for the throne. Renard stands for Stephen, but his neighbour, ever covetous of his lands and of Elene, swaps sides again and again to get the upper hand. But when Renard is kidnapped after defeat in battle, it is Olwyn and Elene who are instrumental in his release and in protecting his lands.

Sex, blood, violence ... just what you want in a good read, but Chadwick writes in such a great way that it is never coarse or over the top. Olwyn is a great character, if a bit annoying, but you can't help liking her plans and intrigues. I really do like this author and must track down the rest of her books at some point.

Lucinda says

Gloriously rich and acutely evocative, this beautifully atmospheric tale is simply breathtaking!

In the Twelfth century, to have is not always to hold...

I am a huge fan and avid reader of Elizabeth Chadwick's work, for I truly believe that she is one of the greatest writers of historical fiction. Bringing the medieval era vividly and realistically to life, Chadwick captures the intensity and passion of the times in such meticulous and exacting detail as to delight. With its shimmering gold cover and delicate binding, 'the leopard unleashed' is something that certainly stands-out on the bookshelf as something exclusive within its genre.

This is the story of Renard, heir to Ravenstow and his journey from humble crusader to impassioned rival. From Antioch he is summoned home to his ill father, where he is met with political strife and family troubles that concern his betrothed Elene. Renard brought Olwen, an exotic dancer from Antioch and is soon confronted with his duty of marriage to the innocent Elene. Torn between his intense feelings for sensual and erotic Olwen and his expected obligations, little does Renard realize that his fate will soon lie within the hands of those two women...

Taken prisoner at the battle of Lincoln and with his former mistress now in the company of a deadly enemy, Renard pins all hope on his loyal and determined wife Elene who endeavors to protect his lands from Ranulf of Chester. But, Elene is inexperienced and naive and so the future hangs on a knife edge in this turbulent and uncertain time.

Exciting and deeply absorbing this dramatic tale I felt was reminiscent of Ken Follett's "the pillars of the earth" and "world without end", for it encapsulates the harshness and brutality of dangerous times wherein heated rivalry and injustice rule supreme. I felt particularly drawn to Elena (almost to the extent that Renard was not morally equal to her), as she is a strong female protagonist with such spirit and heart. Bloodthirsty battles and underhand plots, bitter conflict and passion collide in a masterful work of sheer vision and drama.

Full of substance, Chadwick's writing is secure and assured so as to make it most convincing.

Beautifully blending authentic period detail with modern conviction for emotional, stirring drama Chadwick has successfully brought history into the modern age! 5*

Helen says

I'm on an hugely enjoyable journey working my way through Elizabeth Chadwick's back catalogue of wonderfully addictive historical novels. Now the 'nights are drawing in', it's especially cosy to close the curtains against the rainy darkness and curl up under the fleecy blanket and lose yourself in the dramas of the Middle Ages. Against a backdrop of the Stephen/Matilda wars, 'The Leopard Unleashed' sees Renard, a knight returning from the Crusades, torn between desire for his minx of a mistress and duty towards his sensible wife.

Misfit says

Book Three in the Ravenstow Trilogy. The book opens as Guyan and Judith's oldest son and heir Renard is on crusade, that being the most expeditious method of his avoiding the civil war raging between King Stephen and Empress Mathilda. Renard involves himself with a beautiful exotic dancer, Olwen, and when the summons arrives for Renard to return home to his ailing father, she manipulates Renard into taking her along with him. Once home, Renard must marry the much younger Eleanor, who he was betrothed to ten years prior. Of course, Renard's mother Judith is none too pleased with having Olwen in her household, and eventually Eleanor finds out and this knowledge causes friction in her new marriage.

Renard always believed Eleanor to be an adoring devoted mouse of a girl, and is soon surprised at the depth of her intelligence and business acumen and finds her to be a strong wife and helpmate. Renard and Eleanor begin their marriage amidst the backdrop of England's Civil War, as the Barons waiver between taking sides with Stephen or Mathilda, the evil and deceitful Earl of Chester with an ax to grind with Renard and the manipulations of Olwen.

This is the second time I've read this book, the first being two years ago before I had read much of the author's later works. It was very interesting to revisit her earlier books and see the contrast between them and how the author has grown. While I find this book a great improvement over *The Wild Hunt* and *The Running Vixen* (the first two books in this trilogy), I still did not find the effortless sense of time travel she shows in her later works, as she seamlessly blends the sights, sounds smells, clothing of the medieval period into her stories. Four stars

Krista Baetiong Tungol says

This is Elizabeth Chadwick's third book, the first two being *The Wild Hunt* and *The Running Vixen*. Tagged under Ravenstow Trilogy, this book is set during England's civil war between King Stephen and Empress Matilda, and features the marriage of Renard, heir of Ravenstow and son of Guyon (who is the main man in *The Wild Hunt*), to Lady Elene of Woolcot.

I loved Miss Chadwick's *William Marshal* series, and I would say that Ravenstow series, being her first writing job, is good enough. I only thought I would have serious issues though with phrases like weakening/melting/heavy loins or contracting belly or thundering pulse (when they filled every page), but as they come from a talented author, I realized that I didn't actually mind cringing a great deal.

Kathy says

The Leopard Unleashed by Elizabeth Chadwick is the third book in what's usually referred to as the Ravenstow trilogy (*The Wild Hunt* and *The Running Vixen*), and while each book focuses on the story of a specific family member, each book easily stands upon its own. *Leopard Unleashed* follows the story of Renard fitzGuyon, who has spent the past four years on Crusade. While in Antioch, he gets caught up in a relationship with a fiery half-Welsh dancing girl named Olwen. When Renard receives word that his father is ill and that he must return home, Olwen finagles to have him take her with him.

Back home, he sets her up as his mistress as he prepares to marry Elene, the woman he was betrothed to when they were both children. It's been years since they've seen each other, and Renard finds that instead of an awkward young girl, he has a wife who displays intelligence and maturity. As Olwen manages to get herself set up as the mistress with Renard's bitter enemy, the relationship between Renard and Elene blossoms...but before they can get too settled into domestic bliss, Renard finds himself called upon to fight with King Stephen's army.

Like all of Elizabeth Chadwick's historical novels and romances, I found this one very readable, telling a good story, founded upon excellent research that allows one to get the feel for what life must have been like in 12th century England and the Welsh marches.

The one thing I had a problem with was the relationship between Renard and his mistress, Olwen. It is a tempestuous one, and while I understand her poverty-stricken background makes her do things that are less than nice, I found it hard to sympathize with her. Too many times, her greed overtakes her and causes her to make some very foolish choices. It's not until near the end of the book that I found myself warming up, if just a bit, to her. The fact that I felt this way about a character in a book, however, tells me that the author did a good job in making her characters come to life.

Elis Madison says

The third in Chadwick's first trilogy. This one does weave in more details around the succession crisis and civil war following the death of Henry I. I'd always wondered how Stephen of Blois managed to lose that war and keep the crown. Now it seems a bit clearer. 4 stars.

Rebecca Huston says

It finally arrived from England! (Hurray!) As soon as I finish the current book, I'm diving into this one -- I simply can't resist an unread EC novel at hand. Ok, after blasting through this one in a day, I can say, I keep being impressed. Quite a tangle of characters here -- Misfit, you are right about Olwen! Great story, plenty of

history bits, and great pacing to boot.

For the complete review, please go here:
<http://www.epinions.com/review/Elizab...>

Obidiwhite says

This is the third book of Wild Hunt Trilogy. Though it can be read as a stand-alone novel, I advise readers to also read *The Wild Hunt & The Running Vixen* (Wild Hunt Trilogy #1); to get the full picture of this informative and entertaining medieval romance. Elizabeth Chadwick is a genius at what she does best; story telling !

Erin says

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot...>

I've a problem with Elizabeth Chadwick. Well, not personally, I've a problem reading her work. I pick it up intending to read one chapter, but somewhere between points a and b, I fall through the damned pages and lose all sense of time and responsibility. I should have started the laundry two hours ago, but what was I doing instead? Tramping around the Welsh Marches.

Am I sorry? Not in the least. Okay, maybe a little. I'll be scrambling to find clean clothes come morning, but I'm quite pleased with the time I spent on this book. Chadwick's ability to blend fact and fiction is brilliant and while I don't feel *The Leopard Unleashed* is her strongest effort, I admire much of the content and greatly enjoyed the narrative's direction and tone.

Guyon trumps both, but I admit I like Renard more than Adam. I had difficulty warming to the latter when reading *The Running Vixen*, but Renard's easy-going manner, modest tastes, and perceptive nature intrigued me almost instantly. I wish Chadwick had written more from his perspective, I think there was a lot of untapped potential in his character, but I liked what she offered and thought his personality and disposition engaging just the same.

That said, I think Elene the strongest of the three heroines. She's a contented homemaker, but shrewd, intelligent, and capable. She's insecure, but I think her struggles intensely realistic and I liked how Chadwick was able to showcase her emotions without sacrificing Elene's integrity. Her gentle inexperience makes an interesting contrast to Olwen's bold proclivities, but she's intensely empathetic and I found much to appreciate in her quiet strength and intense loyalties.

I wasn't particularly fond of Olwen, but that has more to do with the structure and development of her character than her personality. She's shamelessly bold and conniving, but I think she'd have read better if the reader had been privy to more of her scheming. She disappears for several chapters of the narrative and is reintroduced in an entirely new situation and I would have liked to see her rationalizing that transition. The incident with Ranulf's would have been equally interesting, as would her seduction of Owain. All this happens 'off screen' and while I recognize the intent, I felt the approach left her somewhat fractured and arbitrary. Like Renard, I liked what was offered, but I think more could have been done with her character and role.

The supporting cast didn't interest me as much as they did in earlier novels. Ranulf of Chester was more a more convincing antagonist than Walter de Lacey, but I struggled to understand the origin of the animosity he harbored against Renard. Judith and Guyon make brief appearances, but their roles aren't as significant as Miles' in *The Running Vixen*. Henry felt underdeveloped in my eyes which made his emotional trials difficult to fathom. Hamo was superfluous in my opinion and while Stephen made an impression, he paled next to predecessors William II and Henry I. I truly enjoyed Chadwick's interpretation of Antioch and the Battle of Lincoln, but I felt the absence of Raymond of Poitiers and Empress Matilda. Both are mentioned, but neither enjoys face time with the reader. Owain Gwynedd interacts with Ranulf toward the end of the novel, but it is a cameo appearance, one that left several unanswered questions in its wake.

There is a lot going on towards the end of the novel and while I appreciated the action, I felt the final chapters rushed and slightly awkward. It isn't like Chadwick to leave loose ends, but I felt there was a lot of unresolved drama in this particular volume and that put a slight damper on my appreciation of the novel's strengths. I loved the book and would definitely recommend it, but I wish there'd been more to it as it doesn't offer the closure one expects at the end of a series.

Sharon says

This book contained characters from previous stories, but I had difficulty keeping everyone straight. Once again, Chadwick tells a tale about daily life in the reign of King John. I enjoyed the story, but found the ending somewhat abrupt. Tantalizing references to Llewelyn of Wales, whom I came to love through Sharon Kay Penman's work.

Susana says

Would be very interesting to find out the story of the characters presented here, like Renard and Olwen's son growing with the Prince of Wales, the betrothal of Renard and Ranulf's son, etc. I can always dream my own stories. This is the stuff of great writing.

Nisareen says

This is the third installment in the Ravenstow trilogy, this time focusing on Renard, the son of Judith and Guyon and future heir to Ravenstow. Having been betrothed to the ten year old Elene at the end of *The Running Vixen*, Renard has gone on crusade to Antioch until Elene comes of age. As a mercenary, Renard has adapted well to mideastern culture but when he receives a summons urging him to return home because his father is seriously ill, Renard wastes little time.

Although he is expected to marry as soon as he arrives on Welsh soil, he is manipulated into bringing with him his mistress Olwen, a half Welsh dancing girl he finds in Antioch, who dupes him into thinking she's carrying his child. They share a tempestuous relationship which threatens to destroy them both. Upon his return, Renard sets Olwen up financially and decides to marry Elene and take on the responsibilities of the Ravenstow.

Renard and Elene begin their marriage amidst the backdrop of England's Civil War, as the Barons waiver between taking sides with Stephen or Mathilda. A division of family loyalties ensues with Renard supporting

Stephen and William supporting the Empress. At the same time the couple are constantly under threat from Ranulf the Earl of Chester who is determined to conquer the Ravenstow lands. Renard has always believed Elene to be an adoring devoted mouse of a girl, and is soon surprised at the depth of her intelligence and business acumen. Their marriage suffers a blow, however, when Elene finds out about Olwen.

When Renard is captured and imprisoned after the Battle of Lincoln, his future lies in the hands of two women: one his former mistress, now in the bed of his deadliest enemy, and the other his wife, frightened and alone, holding his earldom together in the face of terrifying odds.

Renard was one of my favourite characters in *The Running Vixen*, often making me laugh out loud at his audacity and tenaciousness as well as his incorrigibility. I was looking forward to reading about him further in *The Leopard Unleashed* but struggled to reconcile with the Renard from *The Running Vixen* with the Renard from *The Leopard Unleashed*. The latter came across as impetuous and most of the time full of rage with little explanation given to why or what has happened to make him be this way. Olwen was an interesting and complex character whom I found myself admiring and sympathising with on more than one occasion. I didn't feel that her relationship with Renard got the right closure. She helped him and his family from behind the scenes, which kept the link between them, but they never made peace or got to say goodbye. Elene's growth into a strong and resourceful woman was a pleasure to read. Guyon's death along with Henry's was heartbreaking. This one is the last part of a trilogy and concludes a story about a family living on the English edges of Wales.

Elizabeth Ashworth says

I've been enjoying catching up on some of EC's earlier work which I'd missed. None of them disappoint and this was one that I particularly enjoyed, although there was a measure of tragedy to offset the happy ending. Olwen, the dancing girl was an interesting character and had my sympathies for most of the book. I also enjoyed Elene who grew throughout the book into a strong and resourceful woman. But it is the men that EC portrays so well. They are sometimes flawed, but always likeable and Renard was no exception.

Tracey says

not the most interesting historical read , but some good characters. Two very strong female characters .

Claire (Clairby11xxx) says

(8/10) It took me a little while to get to the end of this as I got waylaid with another book and normal life! That being said I really enjoyed it, I felt that it ended the Ravenstow trilogy very well and loved the revisiting of characters from older books (always a little bittersweet as they age and their own stories conclude).

I really liked that the book starts with Renard on crusade (something you get much more detail on in Chadwick's novel *The Falcons of Montabard* btw), it added an extra element and some unique experience to his character and more importantly introduces Olwen. Olwen I found fascinating and noticed I devoured the chapters she was in the fastest. I couldn't quite figure her out and would have loved to see her in the book a

bit more.

The main female character, Elene, I did like but found a bit tame at times, she almost felt like a pale imitation of Judith from the first book in the trilogy. She does however noticeably grow as a character throughout the book which was nice to follow. Romantically I didn't really feel the connection between her and Renard and found their passion for each other a bit vanilla to be honest, I enjoyed their relationship more as they settled into their marriage and got away from all that awkward first time angst.

As always with an EC novel, there was a great amount of historical context to draw you in to the period, lighter than later novels but if you are looking for a lightly historical easy read then this is the book for you (I would recommend reading the trilogy in order so you are acquainted with all of the characters that pop up).

Ana T. says

have long been fascinated by Elizabeth Chadwick's stories. I take my time reading them because I want to savour every word. Besides her current books in print she has 3 books – the first ones she wrote, The Wild Hunt, The Running Vixen, The Leopard Unleashed– that are OOP and are very HTF. I'm lucky enough to have all 3 and yesterday I finished the third one.

They are known as the welsh trilogy and feature several members of the same family.

Renard of Ravenstow comes back from the crusades after receiving word his father is seriously ill. Although he is betrothed and is expected to marry as soon as he arrives on welsh soil he brings with him his mistress, a half welsh dancing girl he found in Antioch.

Expecting a marriage of convenience only, he soon finds himself drawn to his new wife, Nell, and angry with his mistress's demands. As England is torn apart between Stephen and Matilda's supporters Renard has to face his responsibilities as Earl of Ravenstow and is forced to choose between the two women and what they represent.

As usual Chadwick gives a true feel of the period and all the political and social details really make these stories stand out but I think the main thing is how well she builds her characters, they have true personalities with good things and bad things and we are made to understand what drives their actions.

Although Nell is a more tame heroine than Judith or Heulwen she soon becomes an important part of Renard's life. In fact if I had to mention a recurring theme in these 3 books it would be how strong the women are and how they fight (in different ways) for their love.

I recently discovered that a fourth book was planned, problems with the publisher however ended that project and The Love Knot was born instead.

An A and I highly recommend her books. I still have a few in the TBR pile but I've greatly enjoyed all the ones I've read.

Kelly says

I would have given a higher rating if the characters and emotional impact had supported the level of writing skill in this novel. Unfortunately I found the characters to be undeveloped and the emotion in the novel rather flat, even as I enjoyed the wonderfully crafted plot and writing style.

As an overarching criticism I would say that this was a very emotionless novel, considering there was so much turmoil and danger and so much lust and romance. I didn't once feel any kind of love between Renard and Elene. The biggest example of this was when Renard was taken captive and then returned to Elene and they were both just a bit, "Alright?" rather than being all, "DARLING! MWAH! MWAH! I HAVE MISSED YOU SO DESPERATELY!"

In addition to this lack of emotion their whole relationship felt undermined. Initially this was by the presence of Olwen, but then by this obstinate view of Elene that Renard seemed to hold. He started by believing her to be an airhead before meeting, fine, that can be remedied, but despite examples to the contrary he continued to almost talk down to Elene - his jaw kept dropping when she said something of remote intelligence which annoyed me to no end. Yet it was Renard who was really the airhead, being constantly led about by his hoo-hah, yet believing himself superior intellectually. These issues undermined my confidence in their relationship and made me doubt their love for each other.

I guess my review supports the "It was ok" rating, because it was an 'ok' novel, well-written for sure, but not well characterised.

Robert says

Great book but seemed to finish in a rush. I thought it an improvement from the previous two books in the series. Moving on to another Chadwick book.

Deborah Pickstone says

2.5 stars

I read this to complete the set, really. Olwen is so unlikely it would make a cat laugh. Elene (apart from yet another magical rescue from rape) is believable. Renard is a bit of a dill. Characterisation is poor though writing ability - making a story that flows and hooks you in - is really good. The devil is in the detail and the detail undermines this novel seriously. The Welsh leaders are like caricatures and what in Heaven Owain sees in Olwen is enough to make one goggle.

Pretty dreadful.
